

I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

PSALM 2 – AN ISAGOGIC, EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION PART I

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ABSTRACT. In this research paper, we intend to offer the reader the possibility of becoming more familiar with the main types of biblical commentaries through an exegetic exercise centred round Psalm 2. The choice of the supporting text is not at all random since, even from ancient times, the psalms have benefitted from the attention of an impressive number of interpreters and have been the beginning of both dialogue and controversy between religions (Christianity and Judaism) and Christian denominations. Throughout the exegetical analysis, we took into consideration the rigors of the school of criticism which we correlated with the rabbinic and patristic commentaries in order to accomplish a very ample interpretation. Even if these commentators were not entirely in agreement, rather than bringing to relief their interpretative differences, we tried to underline the common elements existing in the specific manner of interpretation of each exegetical school. Thus, the complexity of this isagogic, exegetical and theological study resides in the fact that it approaches the text of the psalm from a literary, allegorical and spiritual point of view and it can become a hermeneutical paradigm for those who wish to study the Holy Scriptures with scientific and spiritual accuracy.

Key-words: psalm, rabbis, Holy Father, critical interpretation, king, LORD, Messianic perspective

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- ¹ *Why do the heathen¹ rage and the people imagine a vain thing?*
² *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,*
³ *Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords² from us.*
⁴ *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh³: the Lord shall have them in derision.*
⁵ *Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.*
⁶ *Yet⁴ have I set⁵ my king upon my holy hill of Zion.*
⁷ *I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.*
⁸ *Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.*
⁹ *Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*
¹⁰ *Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth.*
¹¹ *Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.*
¹² *Kiss the Son⁶, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

After having initially presented the events that took place during the ceremony of coronation of a king from the Davidic dynasty⁷, this psalm, which is

¹ Taking into account the fact that the word גוֹיִם (*goim*) indicates those that are outside the borders of the chosen people which were in fact pagan and idolatrous some of the translators have chosen here the word *pagan* (*heathen* for the English version) (B. 1936, KJV), which is disapproved by some exegetes. Rabbi Solomon FREEHOF, *The Book of Psalms: A commentary* (Cincinnati: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1938), 14.

² The Septuagint translates this word with ζυγός which means *yeoke*.

³ I chose to translate the verbs in this verse with the Present Tense and not with the Future (which can be found in the Greek original), because it is much more suitable to the context. Cf. Mayer GRUBER, *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms* (Boston: Leiben, 2004), 175; Ioan POPESCU-MĂLĂIEȘTI, „Psalms,” *BOR* 6 (1904), 653; B. 1936.

⁴ In this case the particle ו (vav) is obviously adversative. Cf. George PHILLIPS, *The Psalms in Hebrew; with a critical, exegetical and philological commentary*, vol. 1 (London: J. W. Parker, 1846), 16.

⁵ Because of the fact that the verb נָסַךְ (*nasakh*) is translated by *to pour* some translators have used here the word *anointed*. You can find more details to this respect in the section dedicated to this verse.

⁶ The expression *kiss the Son* is one of the most famous expressions from the Psalms that constituted a point of interest for the exegetes concerning a translation and interpretation close to the original text. In the theological jargon this is a *crux interpretum*. For more details see the exegetical analysis of the verse.

⁷ Although the covenant between God and David was eternal, the reassertion of it was necessary from time to time. The most suitable time for this was during the coronation ceremony, when a new descendant from the royal family of David came to the throne. Thus, as far as we are concerned, together with the divine words *thou art my Son* it is also reasserted the bond between God and the Davidic dynasty represented by the new crowned king. Peter CRAIGIE, „Psalms 1-50,” in *WBC 19* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 67. Cf. *Septuaginta. Psalmii, Odele, Proverbele, Ecleeziastul, Cântarea Cântărilor*, vol. 4/I, ed. Cristian Bădiliță (București: Polirom, 2006), 42-3; Alois BULAI et al., *Psalmii. Traducere, note și comentarii* (Iași: Sapientia, 2005), 15-6.

included in the category of the royal psalms⁸, developed a Messianic perspective acknowledged almost unanimously by the exegetes. Starting with Rashi⁹, most of the modern and contemporary¹⁰ Jewish have presented reservations towards this approach, although the rabbis anterior to them¹¹ have accepted this Messianic interpretation. This attitude was generated by the Christological perspective that the Christian offered to this text even from the early period of the Church. This is confirmed by an older edition of the translation of Rashi's commentary on the Psalms where he states that he prefers a literal interpretation, contrary to the Jewish traditional exegesis, because of the Christian interpretation: "Our Rabbis have explained this psalm referring to the king Messiah, but for the sake of a literal sense *and as an answer to the Christian*, it is more appropriate to interpret it as referring to David himself"¹².

The Messianic content of the psalm determined the hagiographs of the New Testament to refer more to this text in order to underline both the fulfillment of the narrated events and the Savior's status in comparison with the Father and with the other creatures. In Acts (4:24-28¹³) we are told about the fact that the

⁸ Mitchell DAHOOD, "Psalms," in *AB 19A* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 7. Cf. Hans-Joachim KRAUS, *Psalms 1-150: A Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. H. C. Oswald (Mineapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 125; Artur WEISER, *The Psalms. A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 109; Rabbi Benjamin SEGAL, *Psalm 2 – Two Interpretations of the Divine Right of Kings*, in http://psalms.schechter.Edu/2010/02/psalm-2-two-interpretations-of-divine_21.html (accessed 8th May 2013).

⁹ Mayer GRUBER, *Rashi's Commentary*, 174.

¹⁰ Rabbi Solomon FREEHOF, *The Book of Psalms*, 13-4; Rabbi Benjamin SEGAL, *Psalm 2*.

¹¹ In the Talmud, rabbis mention a dialogue between Messiah and God in which the Messianic dimension of this Psalm is emphasized: "Our Rabbis taught, The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to the Messiah, the son of David (May he reveal himself speedily in our days!), *Ask me anything and I will give it to thee*, as it is said, *I will tell of the decree etc. this day have I begotten thee, ask of me and I will give the nations for thy inheritance*. But when he will see that the Messiah the son of Joseph is slain, he will say to Him, *Lord of the Universe, I ask of Thee only the gift of life*. As to life, He would answer him, *Your father David has already prophesied this concerning you*, as it is said, *He asked life of thee, thou gavest it him, [even length of days for ever and ever]*". <http://halakhah.com/pdf/moed/Sukkah.pdf> (accessed 8th May 2013). Rabbi Abraham Ibn EZRA, *Commentary on the First Book of Psalms: Chapters 1-41*, ed. H. Norman Strickman (Yashar Books, 2007), 12. Cf. http://halakhah.com/berakoth/berakoth_7.html#PARTb (accessed 8th May 2013); Rabbi David KIMHI, *The longer commentary of R. David Kimhi on the first Book of Psalms*, ed. R.G. Finch (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1919), 13.

¹² George PHILLIPS, *The Psalms in Hebrew*, 9-10. Although this insertion cannot be found in most of the editions, the researchers confirm its credibility. Cf. Rabbi Yapheth ben HELI BASSORENSIS KARAÏTAE, *In librum Psalmorum comentarii Arabici*, ed. L. Bargès (Lutetiae Parisiorum: Excudebant Firmin Didot Fratres, 1846), 94 and A. JENNINGS, *The Psalms with introduction and critical notes* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1884), 8.

¹³ "And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The

people gathered around the disciples of the Lord, impressed by the manner in which Saint Apostles Peter and John escaped from the hands of the priests and the elders of the people after healing a man who was lame, said a prayer in which they refer to the prophecy that David uttered in psalm 2 (vv. 1-2) regarding the sufferings of Jesus Christ brought unto Him by those that gathered against Him (Herod, Pilate and pagans and the Israeli people). It is important to mention here, besides the exact identification of the narrated event, that the first Christian community was already accustomed to this interpretation that was most probably presented previously by one of the apostles. In the same book (Acts 13:33¹⁴), within the discourse that Saint Paul gave in the Synagogue from Antioch of Pisidia, he refers to the text of verse 7 from psalm 2 in order to support his idea that the Lord's resurrection was foretold by David through this text and through the text from psalm 15 (v. 10)¹⁵. In the Epistle to Hebrews, the same text from psalms is used to indicate the relationship between the Savior and the Father and implicitly His pre-eminence above the angels (1:5¹⁶), and in chapter 5 (v. 5¹⁷), the text in correlated with verse 4 from psalm 109 in order to underline the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ. Echoes of this psalm can also be found in the names that are given to Jesus Christ by Nathanael who calls Him the Son of God and the king of Israel¹⁸ (John 1:49) or by Caiaphas that asks Him whether He is Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 26:63). The eschatological perspectives of the psalm, also indicated by the Jewish exegesis¹⁹, can be found in the Revelation where the Messianic king will

kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done”.

¹⁴ “God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee”.

¹⁵ In Romans 1:3-4, Saint Paul refers indirectly to the same text of the psalm.

¹⁶ “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?”

¹⁷ “So also Christ glorified not himself to be made a high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee”.

¹⁸ Although Christ had done nothing to prove His royalty, Nathanael correlates the image of Messiah of which he was already convinced with that of king. The paternity of the Davidic royalty, prophesized by Nathan and obviously underlined in psalm 2 “represents nothing else but the fact that the chosen people had to wait, in eschatological perspective, for the ideal king, for Messiah”. Ioan CHIRILĂ, *Mesianism și Apocalipsă în scrierile de la Qumran* (Cluj-Napoca: Arhidiecențana, 1999), 25.

¹⁹ R. Johanan spoke for R. Simeon b. Yohai: “the presence of a bad son in the home of a man is worse than the war with Gog and Magog. For in the psalm of David written as he was running away from his son Absalom it is said: *Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!* (Ps. 3:1). But regarding the war with Gog and Magog it is said: *Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?* (Ps. 2:1) and it is not written: *how many are my foes*”. http://halakhah.com/berakoth/berakoth_7.html#PARTb (accessed 8th May 2013) and Mayer GRUBER, *Rashi's Commentary*, 174.

destroy those who stand against Him and He will rule with an iron scepter (12:5; 19:15 – cf. Ps. 2:9)²⁰.

ELEMENTS OF ISAGOGUE

The dating of the psalm. Based on the fact that the psalm describes events from the life of king David or of his son Solomon, the rabbinic exegesis considered that the text of this psalm was written most probably during the rule of the second king of Israel. Starting with Rashi²¹ and David Kimhi²² the idea occurred that the psalm was written by David in the period right after the conquest of Jerusalem when the Philistines invaded the Valley of Rephaim in order to stop David's ascension who was already crowned as king in Hebron and also to stop the consolidation of the kingdom of Israel (2 Samuel 5:17). Against this opinion stands the argument that David was not anointed king in Zion (as it is understood from the text of the psalm), but, as I have already mentioned, he was crowned only in Hebron and in Bethlehem by Samuel²³. However, if we take into account the testimony of the historian Josephus Flavius who states that the Philistines were joined in that battle by Syrians, Phoenicians and other warrior nations²⁴ (a fact mentioned by the first verses of the psalm) we may state that the respective event may be considered as starting point of this psalm. To support this possible dating we may also mention Mitchell Dahood's opinion who states that the style and the language in which this text was composed both indicate the early period of regality, somewhere in the 10th century BC²⁵. Other exegetes²⁶ think that the

²⁰ Franz DELITZSCH, *Biblical commentary on The Psalms*, v. 1, ed. Fancis Bolton (Edimburg: T. & T. Clakk, 1871), 90-1. Cf. Andrew BONAR, *Christ and His church in the Book of Psalms* (New York: R. Carter & Brothers, 1860), 5-7.

²¹ Mayer GRUBER, *Rashi's Commentary*, 174.

²² Rabbi David KIMHI, *The longer commentary*, 12.

²³ In the Books of Samuel we can find three moments in which David was anointed as king: the first time by Samuel in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:12-13), the second time by the elders of the people of Judah in Hebron, right after the death of Saul (2 Samuel 2:4), and the third moment still in Hebron, but there he was anointed by the elders of the entire Israel at approximately seven years after the second anointing (2 Samuel 5:3).

²⁴ "But let him know that all Syria and Phoenicia, with many other nations besides them, and those warlike nations also, came to their assistance, and had a share in this war, which thing was the only cause why, when they had been so often conquered, and had lost so many ten thousands of their men, they still came upon the Hebrews with greater armies". Josephus Flavius, *Antichitāti iudaice*, vol. 1, ed. Ioan Acsan (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2002), 372.

²⁵ Mitchell DAHOOD, *Psalms*, 7.

²⁶ Rabbi Solomon FREEHOF, *The Book of Psalms*, 13-4. Cf. Alexander Potts et al., *The Psalms. Chronologically arranged* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1870), 49.

psalm describes the event of the coronation of King Solomon whom God Himself calls as his Son (cf. 2 Samuel 7:14). This opinion was contradicted by the fact that when he ascended on his father's throne, Solomon did not have to confront a tensioned external situation (cf. 1 Chron. 22:9), but only the failed attempt of his brother Adonijah who proclaimed himself king²⁷. But the beginning of the regency of kings Azariah, Hezekiah, Josiah and even Zerubbabel²⁸ took place in precarious conditions when the internal and external pressures were rather strong²⁹. Although the iconic image of the king described within the psalm surpasses the personalities mentioned, because not even David was promised a domination that would extend over all the nations and people of the earth.

Because of this some biblicists have launched an opinion according to which the psalm is a postexilic creation³⁰. Besides the literal arguments³¹, they also considered that the author of the psalm wanted to restore the image of the king that comes from the Davidic dynasty and has a divine legitimacy. Thus, the psalm could have been written as a reaction to the illegitimate ruling of Alexander Jannaeus³². The opinion of these exegetes who place the composition of the psalm in the period posterior to the Babylonian exile was received with reservation by most of the interpreters. Their option for a later dating catches rather the Jewish tendency to interpret the royal psalms from a Messianic and eschatological perspective after their return from captivity when the hope of the restoration of the Davidic monarchy became harder and harder to fulfil³³.

The author. Taking into account the fact that one of the hagiographs of the New Testament indicates David as the author of this psalm (Acts 4:25), most of the exegetes (rabbis³⁴, fathers of the Church³⁵ and contemporary biblicists³⁶)

²⁷ Franz DELITZSCH, *Biblical commentary*, 90. George PHILLIPS, *The Psalms in Hebrew*, 11.

²⁸ THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA, *Commentary on Psalms 1-81*, ed. Robert Hill (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 17.

²⁹ Cf. Charles BRIGGS and Emilie BRIGGS, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1906-07), 13.

³⁰ E O USUE, "Theological-mythological viewpoints on divine sonship in Genesis 6 and Psalm 21", in *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 3 (2005), 821.

³¹ André ROBERT, "Considérations sur le messianisme du Ps. II", *Recherches de Sciences Religieuses* 39 (1951-52), 97.

³² Charles BRIGGS, *The Book of Psalms*, 25. Cf. Patrick BOYLAN, *The Psalms. A Study of the Vulgate Psalter in the light of the Hebrew Text*, vol. 1 (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, Ltd., 1921), 6.

³³ *Septuaginta*, 43.

³⁴ Mayer GRUBER, *Rashi's Commentary*, 174; Rabbi Abraham Ibn EZRA, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 12; Rabbi David KIMHI, *The longer commentary*, 12.

³⁵ ST. HILAIRE DE POITIERS, *Commentaire sur le Psaume 2* in <http://www.patristique.org/Hilaire-de-Poitiers-Commentaire-sur-le-Psaume-2.html> (accessed 9th May 2013); CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, vol. 1, ed. P. G. Walsh (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), 57; THOMAS D'AQUIN, *Commentaire sur les Psaumes*, ed. Jean-Éric Stroobant de Saint Éloy (Paris: du Cerf, 1996), 45.

have tried rather to identify the event and the personality to which the author refers within the text of the psalm, than to challenge the Davidic paternity of the writing. The conclusion that the exegetes have reached is that the description does not suit fully to either of the kings, not even to David who could not be so aware of the Messianic consignment of his own person³⁷. Based on these arguments the image of the king was identified most often with Jesus Christ³⁸, which was challenged by the rabbinic commentaries that pointed either to Solomon³⁹ or to Messiah that will destroy Gog and Magog, the kings that will stand against the Lord in the time of the eschaton⁴⁰.

The structure of the psalm. Almost all the exegetes accept a structure of four sections of the psalm, even if the division into verses differs sometimes from one to another: in the first part (vv.1-3) the psalm describes the revolt of the liege kings against the new king that was going to rule over them; the second part (vv. 4-6) emphasizes God's reaction to their plans; the third part (vv. 7-9) presents the attitude of the new sovereign who proves his legitimacy and invites the insurgents to obey him; and in the last part (1-12) it is underlined the possible reconciliation and the conclusion of the psalm⁴¹. For Rabbi Benjamin Segal these sections correspond to the words spoken by the psalmist, God, king and then again by the author of the psalm⁴², and for Cassiodorus who proposes a Christological interpretation, these parts coincide with four moments that contain the plotting of the Jews against Christ, their revolt, God's attitude towards their plans and towards His Son and the advice addressed to the nations to listen to the Lord Jesus Christ and to acknowledge the Christian faith⁴³.

³⁶ Albert BARNES, *Notes, critical, explanatory, and practical, on the book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1868-69), 8-9; George PHILLIPS, *The Psalms in Hebrew*, 6; Adam CLARKE, *Clarke's Commentary: Psalms* (Albany, OR: Ages Software, 1999), 2:1.

³⁷ Franz DELITZSCH, *Biblical commentary*, 90; George PHILLIPS, *The Psalms in Hebrew*, 12.

³⁸ ST. ATHANASIUS THE GREAT, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, ed. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 102; ST. HILAIRE DE POITIERS, *Commentaire sur le Psaume 2*; THEODORE OF MOSPUSTIA, *Commentary on Psalms*, 15. SF. CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEL, „Tâlcuirea psalmilor I (1-8),” ed. Dumitru Stăniloae, *MO* 4 (1989), 38; ST. AUGUSTIN, „Expositions on the Psalms,” in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 8, ed. Philip Schaff (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 2; DIODORE OF TARSUS, *Commentary on Psalms 1-51*, ed. Robert C. Hill (Boston: Liden, 2005), 7; TEODORET DE CİR, *Tâlcuire a celor o sută cincizeci de psalmi ai proorocului împărat David*, ed. PS. Iosif al Argeşului (Petru Vodă: Sfânta Mănăstire Sfinții Arhangheli, 2003), 8; CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 57; *Monumenta linguae dacoromanorum, Biblia 1688, XI. Liber Psalmorum* (Iași: Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2003), 371; *Cartea Psalmilor sau Psaltirea profetului și regelui David*, ed. Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania (Cluj-Napoca: Arhidiecezana, 1998), 37.

³⁹ Rabbi Solomon FREEHOF, *The Book of Psalms*, 14.

⁴⁰ Mayer GRUBER, *Rashi's Commentary*, 174. Cf. Rabbi Yapheth ben HELI BASSOR, *In librum Psalmorum*, 93-4.

⁴¹ Cf. Mitchell DAHOOD, *Psalms*, 7; Peter CRAIGIE, *Psalms*, 60-1; Charles BRIGGS, *The Book of Psalms*, 14-5; Alois BULAI, *Psalmii*, 16.

⁴² Rabbi Benjamin SEGAL, *Psalm 2*.

⁴³ CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 58.

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

Verse 1

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

The interrogative particle לָמָּהּ (*lamma^h*) – *why*⁴⁴ in the beginning of the psalm, although it is used only once in the introductory section, it dominates the first three verses, underlining the query of the psalmist towards the military actions deployed by those who have raised against God and against His anointed⁴⁵. Since he notices the inutility of this outrageous revolt against the immeasurable power of God who supports visibly the newly proclaimed king, the author presents himself surprised of the fact that the leaders of this rebellion do not understand that their victory is actually impossible. Although they hatch battle plans, and display their joined forces in order to intimidate the king, their camp is dominated by agitation, seethe and uncertainty. This reality is rendered in a very subtle manner by the psalmist who uses in sketching this picture words that indicate, through their nuances, a state of anxiety and disquietude.

The perfect רָגַשׁוּ (*ragšu*), whose main meaning is that of *to gather, to gather tumultuously*⁴⁶, expresses a state of agitation that is fated to ensure something or to prevent an unfortunate event⁴⁷. This verb that refers to the formation of a coalition that is anxious to find out the war strategy that will have as purpose the defeat of the king, suscitated a lot the interest of the translators who chose different terms and nuances. For instance, the main Romanian editions, influenced greatly by the Septuagint's option of translation (φρυάσσω – *to goad, to inflame*), rendered the term through the verbs *to amass* (P. 1651), *to chafe* (B. 1688), *to inflame* (B. 1795, B. 1914), *to welter* (B. 1936), each of them trying to render as inclusively as possible the image described by the psalmist. It is important that we notice the fact that the fathers, starting from the etymology of the Greek word, have compared the rebellious with enraged horses that have lost all control and fight against those that try to domesticate them. "The word φρυάσσω – says Diodorus of Tarsus – refers to the neigh that horses make when they hit the ground with their buck. Even when nobody agitates them, their brutal character determines them to be hostile and to attack whoever comes in their way"⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ The interrogation לָמָּהּ (*lamma^h*) is most commonly used when it refers to useless actions. Ioan POPESCU-MĂLĂIEȘTI, *Psalms*, 654.

⁴⁵ Peter CRAIGIE, *Psalms*, 63.

⁴⁶ George PHILLIPS, *The Psalms in Hebrew*, 12.

⁴⁷ Albert BARNES, *Notes on the book of Psalms*, 12.

⁴⁸ DIODORE OF TARSUS, *Commentary on Psalms*, 7. Cf. THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA, *Commentary on Psalms*, 17; CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 59 and EFITMIE ZIGABENUL ȘI SF. NICODIM AGHIORITUL, *Psaltirea în tâlcuirile Sfinților Părinți*, vol. 1, ed. Ștefan Voronca (Galați: Egumenița, 2006), 69.

The other verb יִהְיֶה (*iehgu*) that can be translated with *to ponder, to babble, to meditate* used in the imperfect form indicates an ongoing action. The masses gathered there start to vociferate, they start to launch defamatory statements, to speak vain words full of hatred and threats towards the Israelites which, on one hand have the purpose to draw other people on their side and to raise the moral of the troops and on the other hand they're intended to discourage their opponents. Referring to the historical context that we have already mentioned, Rabbi David Kimhi states that the Philistines considered their defeat by king David to be impossible because not long before Saul and most of the members of the royal family were killed in the battle on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31:2), and the Israelites were defeated⁴⁹. But this arrogant attitude of the coalition was perceived by the psalmist as vain and lacking victory. They had now to deal with an opponent in full ascension who, besides the support of the entire nation, had also the divine support. Influenced by the Ugaritic writings, M. Dahood considers that the verb הִגָּה (*hgh*) must be translated with *to count*, and the noun רִיק (*riq*) with (*military*) *troops*, not with *emptiness (vanity)* as it has already enfranchised, and thus the expression יִהְיֶה-רִיק (*iehgu-riq*) rather has the sense of *to count the troops* than that of *to imagine vain things*⁵⁰. The translation option of the exegete completes the context described by the psalmist and emphasizes a stage prior to the confrontation in which the leaders of the rebellion count their soldiers (gathered from mannier nations⁵¹) in order for them to know who they can count on⁵².

The two terms used by the author to designate the rebels: גֹּיִם (*goim*) – *the heathen* and לְעַמִּים (*leummim*) – *the people* refer to the same category of persons: pagan, inhabitants of the territories outside Israel. The author of the psalm chose two different words because of the stylistic method used for the first verses (synthetic parallelism) which may also require such a rule⁵³. The patristic exegesis that applied the text of the psalm to the events prior to the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 4:24-28), also made a clear distinction between the two terms considering that the first refers in general to Romans⁵⁴ and the other to the Jewish adverse to God who

⁴⁹ Rabbi David KIMHI, *The longer commentary*, 12-3.

⁵⁰ Mitchell DAHOOD, *Psalms*, 7.

⁵¹ Cf. Josephus FLAVIUS, *Antichitāti iudaice*, 372.

⁵² Although the perspective proposed by the famous Biblicist is very interesting and develops constructively the introductory discourse of the psalm, we remain faithful to the traditional translation, and only mention the respective viewpoint.

⁵³ Albert BARNES, *Notes on the book of Psalms*, 12. Cf. Robert BRATCHER and William REYBURN, *A Translator's Handbook on the Book of Psalms* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 23.

⁵⁴ Theodoret of Cyrus considers that it is important to mention that not all of the nations were against Christ but only a category: "He doesn't say *the heathen*, with an article, so that you may think he refers to everyone, but *heathen*, referring to a certain part. For – since, capturing Him, the Jews gave Him to the heathen – that is why he says: For what reason or what has he done that the people came against Him and gave Him in the hands of the heathen?". TEODORET DE CÛR, *Tâlcuire la psalmi*, 8.

gathered around the high priest Annas and Caiaphas⁵⁵. Diodorus, bishop of Tarsus, considers that the terms refer only to the chosen people, the first designating the Israelites or the Galileans assembled around Herod, and the other the Jews from Jerusalem⁵⁶. Saint Cyril of Alexandria has a similar approach that incriminates only the Jews for the rebellion against the Lord⁵⁷.

Verse 2

The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying,

In this verse, the psalmist mentions the reason for which the pagan military forces have gathered and in the same time he offers a few details regarding the leaders of the coalition that started the rebellion⁵⁸. If the previous verse tells us that the plans and the plots of these people lack victory, here another fact is unraveled namely that the kings and leaders of these people rise against God and against the domination that the sovereign that has soon received divine legitimacy has upon them. The words מְלָכִי (*malkei*) – *the kings* and רוֹזְנִים (*roznim*) – *rulers, leaders* indicate without adding any supplementary details the leaders of the rebels. The expression מְלִכֵּי-אֶרֶץ (*melki-eret*) – *the kings of the earth* is rather a mocking expression used with the purpose of underlining the contrast between them and the king whose authority comes from heaven, than an element that could help us identify one of these leaders⁵⁹. To this respect Rabbi David Kimhi states that the leaders of the Philistine tribes, who were in fact only satraps, assumed out of pride royal rights and dignities, without being supported by a monarchic tradition⁶⁰. However, the rabbi does not exclude the possibility that in this coalition there were also present kings and rulers of the neighboring countries. Looking at the text from a Christological perspective, the fathers have identified in the persons of these kings and rulers those who were somewhat involved in the plot to murder the Savior: Herod the Great⁶¹, Herod the Tetrarch, Pilate and the Pharisees, the

⁵⁵ EFTIMIE ZIGABENUL, *Psaltirea*, 69. Cf. ST. HILAIRE DE POITIERS, *Commentaire sur Psaume 2* in <http://www.patristique.org/Hilaire-de-Poitiers-Instruction.html> (accessed 08th July 2013).

⁵⁶ DIODORE OF TARSUS, *Commentary on Psalms*, 7.

⁵⁷ SF. CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEL, *Tâlcuirea psalmilor I*, 38. "Here he convicts more clearly the foolishness of the Jewish, their endless boldness against Christ, the vanity of their ideas and the childishness of their thoughts".

⁵⁸ ALBERT BARNES, *Notes on the book of Psalms*, 13.

⁵⁹ Cf. ROBERT BRATCHER, *The Book of Psalms*, 23.

⁶⁰ Rabbi David KIMHI, *The longer commentary*, 13.

⁶¹ CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 59.

latter being indicated by the word *rulers*⁶².

The form of imperfect hitpael (יִתְצַבּוּ – *itiattebu*) of the verb צָב (to stand, to take position) was translated differently in the Romanian editions. In order to emphasize the revolt of the kings assembled against God and against the king, some translators chose variants such as: *they rebelled* (B. 1874), *they arose*⁶³ or *they revolt* (B. 1938), to the disadvantage of a literal translation which in their opinion wouldn't have covered completely the meaning of the Hebrew word and wouldn't have given it in reflexive form. However, this verb that was translated into Romanian with the expression *stau înainte* (*stand before*) (an option which is based on the text of the Psalms from 1652 and the imperfect form of the verb), indicating rather a status than a physical position⁶⁴, underlines their determination in the position of adversity and revolt that they adopted against God and against His anointed⁶⁵.

The other verb נִסְדּוּ (*nosdu*), a form of niphal perfect formed from the root סָד (to establish, to found, to sand together, to confer with someone, to associate with) was translated in most of the editions with a form of present, not with one of past as it would have been natural, because the conspiracy through which they wish to step aside the authority of the king did not stop, but continued until the purpose of the revolt which they instrumented in several previous meetings was reached⁶⁶. Consequently, by using this verb, the psalmist refers to the counsel that the leaders of the rebellion have before the attack, when naturally the battle strategy is decided.

It is important to notice that these pagans who provoked the revolt had in mind both a physical liberation from the domination of the Hebrew king and a spiritual liberation⁶⁷, because Yahwe, the God of the chosen people, proved to be, in time, a more powerful opponent than their political leaders. This fact was discovered along the history all the Canaanite peoples that came into conflict with the Israelites. Thus, the leaders of this coalition understood that in order for them to get out of the domination of the Hebrew king, they must also fight against their God or, better

⁶² Justifying the use of the plural in the case of the two types of rulers, Saint Efthimios offers this text an interesting spiritual interpretation: "But understand this in a deeper sense, for this is why David said in the plural *kings*, because the thought king of the sin, the devil, being united with Herod, the visible king, were both rising against Christ. The same did the principalities and the dominions of demons, against which we are fighting, according to the Apostle, being united with the aristocrat and governor Pilate, they were fighting against Christ". EFTIMIE ZIGABENUL, *Psaltirea*, 69.

⁶³ Ioan POPESCU-MĂLĂIEȘTI, *Psalmii*, 654.

⁶⁴ CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 59. This doesn't mean that the word cannot refer to the fact that the kings arranged their troops in a battle position. Here their hostile state is the one that generates the other moves too.

⁶⁵ Charles BRIGGS, *The Book of Psalms*, 18. Cf. George PHILLIPS, *The Psalms in Hebrew*, 12.

⁶⁶ CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 59.

⁶⁷ The use of the preposition עַל (*al*) – *against, upon* before the words *Yahwe* and *anointed* confirms this statement. See Charles BRIGGS, *The Book of Psalms*, 18.

said, to try to destroy in the same time both their sovereign and their faith in the divine help. Hence, the divine legitimacy of the new king is the element that determined the rebels to concentrate their attention especially on the spiritual force that might have influenced decisively the fate of this conflict⁶⁸.

Starting with Saul, all the kings of the chosen people were invested in this dignity through anointing (Judges 9:8; 1 Samuel 9:16), an act that symbolized the choosing of the respective person from all the other to accomplish a certain mission⁶⁹. The pouring of the oil unto the head of the new king certified the fact that God offered him legitimacy to rule and considered him His representative or regent amongst the people. When the word מָשִׁיחַ (*mašiah*) – *the anointed* was used as an adjective or noun, as it is the case here, it became an honorary title and indicated either the high priest (Lv. 4:3), or the king (1 Samuel 2:10; 2 Samuel 22:51)⁷⁰. Gradually, this name was given to an iconic royal personality, involved in a special relationship with God, whom he subsequently gave an eschatological mission. Based on these reasons, the name The Anointed⁷¹ which is used in this psalm was firstly given to David⁷², the newly crowned king, and then to Jesus Christ, the supreme coregent (Acts 13:32-33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5), the One who was identified by the authors of the New Testament with Messiah and the awaited King of Israel (John 1:41,49)⁷³.

Verse 3

Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

It is only in this verse that the psalmist reveals clearly the plans of the rebel coalition when he mentions their intentions of undermining the authority of God and that of the king of Israel who constrains them and hedges their liberty.

⁶⁸ In other words, they were fighting against God, both directly and indirectly. Ioan POPESCU-MĂLĂIEȘTI, *Psalmii*, 654.

⁶⁹ Peter CRAIGIE, *Psalms*, 66.

⁷⁰ Correlating this text with that from verse 6 we are sure that here we have to deal with a king, without taking into account the already mentioned context.

⁷¹ Messiah or Christ, according to some translations – P. 1651, B. 2001, FBK etc.

⁷² Rabbi David KIMHI, *The longer commentary*, 13. Cf. Adam CLARKE, *Psalms*, 2:2.

⁷³ The patristic literature identifies and implicitly confirms the Messianic value of this name. Cf. ORIGEN, "Selection from the Psalms", in PG 12, 1104 – Craig BLAISING, et al., *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament (Psalms 1-50)*, vol. 7, (New York: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 13. ST. ATHANASIUS THE GREAT, *The Life of Anthony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, ed. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 102; ST. HILAIRE DE POITIERS, *Commentaire sur le Psaume 2*; THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA, *Commentary on Psalms*, 15. SF. CHIRIL AL ALEXANDRIEI, *Tâlcuirea psalmilor I*, 38; ST. AUGUSTIN, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 2; DIODORE OF TARSUS, *Commentary on Psalms*, 7; TEODORET DE CIR, *Tâlcuire la psalmi*, 8; CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 57; *Liber Psalmorum*, 371; *Cartea Psalmilor*, 37.

Their revolt and irritation is underlined by the verbs נָתַק (*nataq*) – *to break, to crush* and שָׁלַךְ (*shalakh*) – *to throw, to get rid of* which expresses the wish, the urge and the reciprocal instigation to fight in the battle that can bring them liberation⁷⁴.

The relationship of homage between the king and the rebels is presented by the author of the psalm through a metaphorical language. Using the image of *bonds* and *cords*, objects that imply a certain captivity, the psalmist intends to emphasize the control and authority that the sovereign has over them. For a better emphasis on this reality, the translators of the Septuagint considered that it was more suitable to associate the term אָבוֹת (*avot*) – *cord, rope* with the tugs that help the fixation of a yoke (ζυγός) on the neck of an animal⁷⁵.

In comparison with most of the interpreters⁷⁶ who state that the two terms refer to the rebels, Rabbi David Kimhi considers that here the bonds and cords refer to the firm decision of all the Israelites to proclaim David as king, while it was very well known the fact that he had been a ruler only over the tribes that would later constitute the kingdom of Judah. Thus, the coalition lead by the Philistines wanted to break this alliance and compromise the newly proclaimed kingdom⁷⁷.

The patristic perspective offers us many directions of interpretations, but some of them have been applied unsoundly to the text of the psalm. For example, Origen states that these bonds mentioned by the psalmist are “our passions and sins that keep us tied up”⁷⁸. Theodoret of Cyrus states that in this verse, the Holy Spirit calls the faithful to break the bonds with the pagan world, to throw away the burden of the Law and to accept Jesus’s yoke⁷⁹. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem put these words into the mouths of the angels that were present at the passions of the Lord and waited impatiently to crush those that tortured Christ⁸⁰. However, we consider that the most proper spiritual approach that may be applied to this verse is that which refers to the revolt of the Jewish⁸¹ and of the other

⁷⁴ Ioan POPESCU-MĂLĂIEȘTI, *Psalmii*, 656.

⁷⁵ Francis MOZLEY, *The Psalter of the Church. The Septuagint psalms compared with the Hebrew, with various notes* (Cambridge: University Press, 1905), 3. Cf. ST. HILAIRE DE POITIERS, *Commentaire sur le Psaume 2* in <http://www.patristique.org/Hilaire-de-Poitiers-Commentaire-sur-le-Psaume-2.html> (accessed 24th July 2013).

⁷⁶ Mitchell DAHOOD, *Psalms*, 8; Peter CRAIGIE, *Psalms*, 63. Cf. *Liber Psalmorum*, 371.

⁷⁷ Rabbi David KIMHI, *The longer commentary*, 13.

⁷⁸ ORIGEN, „Omiliu la Geneză,” in *PSB* 6, ed. Teodor Bodogae et al. (Bucharest: IBMO, 1981), 47.

⁷⁹ “It seems to me that the Holy Spirit commands to the faithful to say this: “Let us break their bonds – the bonds of the pagan people – and throw away their yoke” – the yoke of the heathen Jewish – and take upon us the good yoke of God”. THEODORET DE CİR, *Tălcuire la psalmi*, 8.

⁸⁰ Cf. J. M. NEALE, *A commentary on the Psalms*, 99.

⁸¹ Saint Eftimios applies these words only to the Jews who although they could have assumed the Lord’s teaching as a natural thing, they chose to stand against it: “Or these words are spoken by the murderer Jews of Christ who said and done such things thinking that they were crushing the bods of slavery of the Father and of the Son and that they throw away the yoke of obedience to God although, naturally, they were subjected to the obedience of God, as His creatures, as it is said: for all things serve You (Ps. 119:91)”. EFTIMIE ZIGABENUL, *Psaltirea*, 71.

people against God and against the *yoke* that Jesus Christ, through His teaching that was spread to all the nations, put over the entire humankind but without forcing it to accept it⁸².

Verse 4

He hath sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

Starting with this verse the psalmist's attention is concentrated on the Lord. Here and in the following two verses the author presents His reaction to the vain plots and plans of the rebels. Each verse in this section corresponds and answers to the first three verses of the psalm⁸³. Hence, the agitation and disorder generated by the gathering of the military force in the first verse is counterbalanced by the detachment and superiority of the One Who lives in heaven. All their attempts to undermine His authority and to escape the Lord's domination are considered to be ridiculous⁸⁴. The rulers of the earth do not realize that their fight against the Lord Who lives in heaven is lost before it even began. The contrast between these powers is emphasized more by the fact that when the psalmist underlines God's superiority, he uses both the participle יֹשֵׁב (*ioşeb*) – *the one who lives* which in the scriptures (cf. 1 Kings 8:25; Am. 1:5, 8) is often used to describe the domination of a sovereign⁸⁵, and also the name אֲדֹנָי (*Adonai*) – *the Lord*⁸⁶ which refers to the quality of supreme ruler of the world⁸⁷.

The clear detachment of God from the rebels and their plans is presented in this verse through an anthropomorphic expression. The psalmist says that God laughs and mocks the rebels when he sees the inutility of their revolt. These verbs that emphasize the lack of concern and the absolute control⁸⁸ were considered by

⁸² St. AUGUSTIN, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 3. CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 60.

⁸³ ALBERT BARNES, *Notes on the book of Psalms*, 15.

⁸⁴ DIODORE OF TARSUS, *Commentary on Psalms*, 8.

⁸⁵ MITCHELL DAHOOD, *Psalms*, 8. Cf. CHARLES BRIGGS, *The Book of Psalms*, 19.

⁸⁶ ADONAI (the Lord, the Master – comes from the verb *adan* – *to decide, to judge, to rule*) presents God as ruler of the entire Universe. Although it is the plural of Adon, "yet the name Adonay has an exclusively singular meaning and applies to the single true God being in the closest relationship with Yahwe not only because it gives it its vocals, but also because it is considered a proper name for God [as we can see in the prophetic writings – Is. 6:1]". Starting with the period of the Achaemenids, within the religious service, for the reading of the Scriptures, it became accustomed to use *Adonai* as a substitute for YHWH. VASILE LOICHIȚĂ, „Numirile biblice ale lui Dumnezeu și valoarea lor dogmatică”, *MB* 10-12 (1956): 154. Cf. VERON McCASLAND, "Some New Testament Metonyms for God", *JBL* 58 (1954): 109.

⁸⁷ ALEXANDER KIRKPATRICK, *The book of Psalms* (Cambridge: University Press, 1905), 9.

⁸⁸ RABBI DAVID KIMHI, *The longer commentary*, 13.

some of the Fathers⁸⁹ to be inappropriate to express God's attitude because the scoff and the mock are rather human passions⁹⁰. Hence, this triumphant attitude does nothing else but underline the fact that God, being empowered, observes that their plans are not only useless but also lack value and harm those that conceive them⁹¹.

Verse 5

Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

The adverbial particle אַז (*az*) – *then* which is placed at the beginning of the verse, underlines the decisive intervention of God Who has decided to end this rebellion⁹². After having emphasized the detachment and calm with which God, in His quality of sovereign of the Universe, looks at the agitation and vain thought of the rebel coalition, the psalmist presents the manner in which those who stood against God and against His anointed are defeated and forced to subject to the divine decision. When the leaders of this rebellion thought they have won, when their pride reached maximum levels, God made His presence felt, proved their lack of power and implicitly the inutility of their revolt, and ended the conflict frightening them with His anger and wrath⁹³.

Using the same anthropomorphic expression as in the previous verse, the psalmist emphasizes the fact that God, without wanting to retaliate⁹⁴, stands against evil, judges and reestablishes the previous rules that the rebels wanted to suppress. Even in this firm and frightening intervention of God the author includes a glimpse of the divine mercy. Besides the concession with which God treated their action of rebellion, the Fathers have underlined the fact that between anger

⁸⁹ "Nothing of all these must be seen in a human perspective, for God does not laugh relaxing His face, nor does He mock contracting His nose. These must be understood as a way of manifestation that He offers to His Saints, for them to understand when they will see the things to come, namely that the name and rule of Christ will pervade posterity and will bend the nations, that these people *imagine vain things*. Hence, when it is spoken of God's laughter and mockery towards these we have in mind this power given to the saints". ST. AUGUSTIN, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 3.

⁹⁰ EFTIMIE ZIGABENUL, *Psaltirea*, 71.

⁹¹ THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA, *Commentary on Psalms*, 21.

⁹² Cf. DIODORE OF TARSUS, *Commentary on Psalms*, 8.

⁹³ George PHILLIPS, *The Psalms in Hebrew*, 16; Albert BARNES, *Notes on the book of Psalms*, 15. Ioan POPESCU-MĂLĂIEȘTI, *Psalmii*, 657.

⁹⁴ ST. AUGUSTIN, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 3. CASSIODORUS, *Explanation of the Psalms*, 61. Cf. ST. HILAIRE DE POITIERS, *Commentaire sur le Psaume 2* in <http://www.patristique.org/Hilaire-de-Poitiers-Commentaire-sur-le-Psaume-2.html> (accessed 24th July 2013).

and wrath (the latter being the external manifestation of the first, its result⁹⁵) there is a time in which reformation and acknowledgement of the errors may take place⁹⁶. Hence, before the divine wrath bursts out, God always warns and offers a time for penitence⁹⁷.

⁹⁵ *Septuaginta*, 43. Saint Basil states that: "It is a great difference between anger and wrath: anger is a process of thinking through which sad things are reminded to the one that deserves it, and the wrath is the very pain and punishment that the Rightful Judge gives on account of the injustice committed". Cf. EFTIMIE ZIGABENUL, *Psaltirea*, 71.

⁹⁶ ORIGEN, "Selection from the Psalms", in *PG* 12, 1104 – Craig BLAISING, *ACCSOT (Psalms 1-50)*, 13.

⁹⁷ J. M. NEALE, *A commentary on the Psalms: from primitive and mediaeval writers and from the various office-books and hymns of the Roman, Mozarabic, Ambrosian, Gallican, Greek, Coptic, Armenian, and Syrian rites*, vol. 1 (London/ New York: J. Masters/Pott and Amery, 1869), 100. Some consider that the psalmist refers prophetically to the reproof that the Pharisees will have to take for the disobedience of Christ's words (TEODORET DE CIR, *Tâlcuire la psalmi*, 8; THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA, *Commentary on Psalms*, 21), and other think that here there is a reference to the wrath from the eschatological times (EFTIMIE ZIGABENUL, *Psaltirea*, 71; Rabbi Yapheth ben HELI BASSOR, *In librum Psalmorum*, 105-6).